

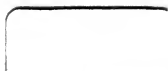
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THEOSOPHY *and*
CHRISTIANITY

Max Seiling







*THEOSOPHY AND
CHRISTIANITY*

THEOSOPHY *and* CHRISTIANITY

*A signpost for those who desire
information concerning Theosophy*

By
MAX SEILING

With an Afterword by
DR. RUDOLF STEINER

*Translated from the German with the author's permission
by*
"A. R."



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BEFORE I enter upon the relation between Theosophy and Christianity I must try to throw some light upon the essence of that significant spiritual movement about which current ideas are, generally speaking, confused or mistaken.

That much misused word, Theosophy, as far as I know, occurs for the first time in the writings of St. Paul (1 Cor. ii, 7). What the Apostle understood by the term it is not easy to say; yet so much is certain, that what is meant by "the hidden wisdom of God" is no wisdom of this world. He who employs this term nowadays generally has in mind the movement set on foot by Madame Blavatsky and is of the opinion that it deals with a more or less fantastic and, specifically, Indian thought and

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learning, even if he does not speak, with Chamberlain, of the "pseudo-Buddhistic sport of the half-educated idler." Fortunately I can speak on Theosophy without being obliged to touch on the complicated nature and the storm-tossed life of that strange and remarkable woman; for in that case I should have little space to satisfy to any degree the claim of the reader concerning my important theme.

The knowledge I had gained in former years concerning Madame Blavatsky and the doctrines advocated by her had not been conducive to my drawing any nearer to the Theosophical movement. My attention, however, became riveted when the leadership of this movement was undertaken in Germany by Dr. Rudolph Steiner. It being comparatively little known how important a factor of the movement this man is, the most essential points must first be given.

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There are two special works which, next to the public lectures and the answering of questions afterwards asked, give brilliant witness to Doctor Steiner's keenness of mind and his extraordinary knowledge—*Die Philosophie der Freiheit*¹ and *Welt- und Lebensanschauungen im 19ten Jahrhundert*.² While in the former book a world-outlook, modern in the best sense and doing full justice to individuality, is put forth with rare profundity, the second work presents an investigation which seizes with extraordinary assurance upon the vital points in the comprehensive theme, reaching from Kant to Haeckel. Without renouncing his own sharply defined world-outlook, Steiner has known so well how to project himself into the thoughts of others that often one cannot in the least detect his own antagonistic standpoint. Above all, he has done as

¹ *The Philosophy of Freedom*, Berlin, 1894.

² *Views of the World and of Life in the 19th Century*, Cronbach, Berlin.

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much justice to the materialistic creed as can be demanded of a philosopher standing at a higher point of observation. An investigator who in the course of his observations and examinations does not betray the slightest sympathy or antipathy, and who adopts a severely objective standpoint, appears to be trustworthy in the highest degree. It should also be mentioned that through several publications on Goethe, especially Goethe's *Weltanschauung*,¹ Steiner has proved himself one of the best connoisseurs of our great sage. Engaged for several years with the Goethian archives, he also published Goethe's works on Natural Science in Kurschner's *Deutsche National Literatur* and supplied the weighty prefaces doing justice to that great genius. It seems to me noteworthy that Steiner's merits in reference to his Goethe investigations are also highly praised by Chamberlain in

¹ *Outlook on the Universe*, Weimar, 1897.

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his *Kant*. Whoever wishes to learn more of Steiner's laborious life is referred to the preface which the French mystic and poet, Édouard Schuré, has given in his translation of Steiner's *Das Christentum als mystische Tatsache*.¹

When, therefore, a Rudolph Steiner had begun to promulgate Theosophy, I felt it my duty to pay closer attention to it. My desire for knowledge became all the stronger when I found that the new apostle had reached the truths of Theosophy by another road than that of Madame Blavatsky, namely, that of Western mysticism. Faced by the question as to whether he would join the Theosophical Society which had originated from the East, or call into being a new and separate movement, Steiner decided on the former. Doubtless this decision sprang from a truly Theosophical feeling, which, from the aspect of mediation

¹ *Christianity as a Mystic Fact. Le Mystère Chrétien*,⁶ Paris, 1908.

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and reconciliation, endeavors to emphasize not that which separates but that which unites humanity. And here certainly there was enough in common. However, that which chiefly differentiated the two schools was not indeed an irreconcilable antithesis but solely a great lack in the Oriental wisdom — an ignorance of the true meaning of Christianity. Certainly at this juncture there was nothing to prevent Steiner from lighting a mighty torch and by its means setting the Eastern teaching for the first time in the right light, because the conception of evolution most closely bound up with Theosophy has also to be taken into consideration by Theosophical Science. Besides this, there had to be given to the whole system a more solid and determinate form; also in relation to the practical side, the great difference between East and West had to be pointed out, so that there

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cannot be the remotest suspicion of a propagation of Asiaticism. Further, Steiner avoids as much as possible the Indian terminology, but cannot do so altogether because Western thought is not acquainted with certain of the ideas and, consequently, possesses no words for them.

It was no mere chance that the Theosophical movement set in at about the same time that the scientific conquest of Materialism was more and more conceded, although simultaneously the "Ignorabimus" was acknowledged and with it the point to which Natural Science *is willing* to go. Upon that which lies beyond that point—Mysticism—modern Natural Science does not consider itself able to venture, because it cannot conceive any idea of it other than that of an involved and confused mentality. But how would it be if there were even now a Mysticism which had hands and feet, meaning

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and sense, and were completely independent of personalities? This is what Rudolph Steiner insures to us now — a man as complete as he is many-sided—in his intimacy with scientific methods; only such a personality dares, in the West, to feel himself called to such a work, and he does it in such a manner that the unprejudiced cannot leave it unnoticed. The first point in the Theosophical philosophy of the universe is less a matter of definite knowledge than of a particular kind of investigation, which presents a pronounced contrast to the usual scientific methods. Whereas the latter rest chiefly on the evidence of the senses, Theosophy has to do with *supersensory* experiences. It asserts that inner organs of perception — spiritual eyes and ears, as Goethe calls them—can be developed in man, with which the soul and the spirit worlds are as perceptible

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as is the physical world to the external senses. Accordingly, the Theosophist would stand in a similar relationship to the non-Theosophist as a person with sight to one born blind. If the latter can obtain an idea of the physical world through the sense of touch alone, then the one who sees can attain the perception of color and other things only through light, and through the seeing of existing conditions. When Natural Science disputes the possibility of supersensory sight, it is as if the blind were to declare to be mere fallacy that which those who can see, say about colors. The actuality of the secret knowledge affirmed by the Theosophist is also confirmed by the mystics of all ages, to whom, if in a wider sense, Goethe, that idol of humanity, belongs.¹

¹ Goethe's mystic knowledge is particularly noticeable in *Faust*, in the "Märchen" (*Fairy Tales*), and in the "Geheimnisse" (*Secrets*). When any one fails to recognize and understand the mystic in Goethe that is

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The word Theosophy gives rise to a peculiar misunderstanding in so far as people are prone to suppose that behind "Divine wisdom" there is a pretended knowledge of God. It is rather a matter of "God-like wisdom," that is, a knowledge of the inner and imperishable man, of the germ of the Divine Being concealed within him. Theosophy, or, as Steiner prefers to call it, Spiritual Science, differentiates itself from ordinary science not through the subject matter of which it treats but through the *manner* of treating it; consequently Spiritual Science will never prove spiritual experiences but only point to them. Moreover, it has nothing to do with speculation, but with supersensory *facts*, which can as little contradict Natural Science as the declaration of the sight-gifted can contradict what the blind not his fault, for he is really comprehensible only to the "initiate," as Goethe himself once explained to Eckerman in reference to the second part of *Faust*.

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man has decided through his sense of touch. Contradictions occur only in connection with speculative, especially materialistic, *explanations* of the facts of Natural Science. But that explanations of this kind are not to be taken seriously Goethe affirms when he says that the scientific investigator is really only joking and making fun of us when he explains a phenomenon."¹

When one asks what is the exact *value* of Theosophical knowledge, at first sight it would seem simply preposterous to demand that one should accept things not within one's own control, which can be known only through supersensory experiences, and which are in the first place possible to very few people. One can, and most people will, reject the standpoint of this mode of investigation, but its untenableness is by no means

¹ *Conversation of German Emigrants (Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten).*

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proved by the fact that, especially in reference to the doctrine of evolution, one can set absolutely no limitations to the powers of human knowledge. There is a remarkable contradiction when the word "evolution" is always on our lips and yet we have no real belief in it; that is, we assume that it is out of the question to-day for those who admit the experiences of the senses and the activity of the intellect. But he who declares only that to be *true* which is perceptible to the ordinary senses, resembles one of the lower creatures if it were to assert the non-existence of colors and sounds merely because it cannot perceive them. It is evident that only those can describe what is perceptible who have the requisite organs. It is only too easy to account for the great lack of modesty in the present generation, as manifested for the most part in taking its own capacity for knowledge as the measure of knowledge itself,

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because our whole civilization is too closely bound up with Natural Science, which relies only on the evidence of the senses. It is a result of the suggestion of the masses when a theologian like Adolph Harnack can say incidentally that every idea of a future life is cut off and exterminated.

However, Theosophy is far from underestimating the immense successes of external civilization; rather, it shows that development had to take this course, and gives the reasons why. It adds, however, that future development depends upon the awakening of slumbering faculties, of which certain persons are already in possession.

The "unscientific" request to take the existence of such powers without proof appears at once in a greatly extenuated light when one keeps in mind that scientific results must, for the most part, be taken on faith and trust, since only in the rarest cases is the individual capable of applying

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a critical test; whereas, even though it be somewhat difficult of attainment, the *possibility* of personally ratifying supersensory facts is given to *every* person. Moreover, many of the accepted scientific results are in nowise truths firmly established beyond the region of doubt. In science we meet much more, step by step, with hypothesis, superstition, and idolatry, apart from the fact that in general no philosophy of life (the Theosophical one gained by personal experience excepted) can be maintained without metaphysical elements or dogmas. Materialism, in particular, is just as dogmatic as is any exoteric religion. There is only one difference, and that is to the disadvantage of materialism, in the contents of the dogma. Theosophy, moreover, demands no belief in its doctrines but only belief in the possibility of arriving, through one's own experience, at a knowledge of

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these doctrines; it desires to point out the way to this end and asks for impartiality and good will. Before one can, oneself, be a seer and a knower, one must accept the Theosophical doctrine as a working hypothesis—a thing indispensable also in scientific methods. This appears the more admissible since many facts become clearer through Theosophical hypothesis than through any other views. Added to this, one arrives by the avenues of thought at quite a number of Theosophical perceptions just because they are so absolutely rational. In this connection, besides Steiner's *Philosophie der Freiheit*¹ and *Erkenntnistheorie der Goetheschen Weltanschauung*² are to be strongly recommended Dr. C. Unger's excellent handbooks on theories of knowledge.³ It is to be remarked further

¹ *Philosophy of Freedom.*

² *Cognition Theory of the Goethian Universal Philosophy.*

³ Phil. Theos. Publish. Co., Berlin, W. Motzstr. 17.

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that the assertions of Theosophy can in many cases be tested and have, in part, already been ratified by science. The most remarkable corroboration of this fact is that Doctor Ardlit writes, in the magazine *Kosmos* (1905), in a manner which coincides noticeably with Theosophical statements concerning the portion of the earth, called Atlantis, buried under the Atlantic. Lastly, we must remember that beside the faculties of conscious clairvoyance there are those which can never be understood by the sense perceptions and intellectual faculties, especially the powers of vision and creation possessed by great artists, as also the subconscious looking into futurity and space by the somnambulist. (Goethe so often gives his opinion to the effect that the creation of the artist is due to a kind of madness, that with his declarations on the subject I was able to fill several pages of my protest—*Goethe and*

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*Materialism.*¹) Somnambulistic clairvoyance has been so frequently and soundly proved, that skepticism on such a point amounts to nothing less than ignorance. Enough! One has every reason for once to put aside one's own convictions, notwithstanding their impregnability, and at least to listen to what is imparted by the mouth of Theosophy. If one could only rid oneself of prejudice, one would soon find that Theosophy is very clear and illuminating; this, and not simplicity, is the *criterion* of Truth.

We will now briefly discuss *the most necessary fundamental principles of Theosophy*, as expressed by Rudolph Steiner.² First of all, we must refer to the expression resounding from the

¹ C. Mutse, Leipzig.

² In *Theosophy* (Kegan Paul and Trench, London), *Initiation and Its Results*, *Atlantis and Lemuria*, and *An Outline of Occult Science* (translation of the latter will shortly appear), as well as other works. For information, apply to Mr. Max Gysi, "Appledore," Park Drive, Hampstead, London, N. W.

wisdom of Goethe: "Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis (Everything transitory is but a simile)." Behind the perishable physical world stands an imperishable and spiritual, of which the former is merely a revelation, a kind of reflected image, and, as such, only a portion; that is, the spiritual world is richer than the physical, and cannot therefore find its full expression through the latter. If the spiritual world is thoroughly conceivable (if not for the materialist) it is for the occult investigator even a matter of experience. Where the scientific teacher, employing merely his ordinary senses, can observe only effects, it is possible for the other to rise above the sensory facts to exact causes, and, for example, to perceive that the electric phenomena in the sky are caused by certain beings who have their existence in a higher world. So also, a whole hierarchy of spiritual beings took

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part in the formation of the world. The Monist need not let himself be disturbed by the dreadful thought of a chance Dualism, because the terrestrial world can be understood as the temporary consolidation of a spiritual world. As a Theosophist one's mental horizon is so immensely widened that one does not trouble oneself any more about such opposites as Monism and Dualism. The world is not so simple that one can describe its existence with such catch-words as these. Thus it happens that the present mode of gaining knowledge, founded on the so-called objective consciousness, has only a relative value in that it merely touches on one phase in the development of human knowledge. One cannot speak of such a thing as limited absolute wisdom. It is only asserted that the occult teacher, in virtue of his supersensory experiences (to which his intercourse with higher

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spiritual beings also belongs)¹ can attain to far more widely reaching perceptions than the ordinary person. It is to be remembered in passing that when the initiate has attained a certain degree of development, the world reveals itself to him in tones. It would seem as if Goethe also had known of this "music of the spheres," for he begins the prologue in Heaven with the words, "As of yore the sun resounds"; and again, in the beginning of the second part of *Faust*, he says:

"With tones that sound for spirit hearing
The new-born day is now appearing."

One cannot speak here of any hallucination of poetic fancy, nor indeed of a phrase, because, as he himself has so often attested, Goethe's thoughts and poems are quite objective. Concerning the existence of the resonant world it may be further

¹ These are the "unknown higher beings" for whom Goethe calls forth veneration in his poem, *Das Göttliche* (*The Divine*).

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explained how Schopenhauer, and with him Richard Wagner with his intuitive genius, could go so far as to assign to music a special place in the kingdom of art because it *directly* expresses the very inner being of the world.

A second fundamental doctrine is what may be called, in the most comprehensive sense of the word, the admitted evolution of the earth and of its inhabitants. What people so generally understand by evolution is, according to the Theosophical standpoint, concerned with only one part of the universal process, and one which is restricted to the world of the senses. Taken quite externally, there exists in reference to this part a certain resemblance between the materialistic perception and the Theosophical presentations; inwardly, according to the true sense, there is a world of difference between them. In reference, for instance, to the much vexed

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question of the origin of man, the occult teacher assures us that man is not a highly developed ape but that the latter is rather a shriveled-up, deteriorated relative of man. This doctrine is undoubtedly more rational than the other, according to which a lower is said to have developed to a higher and that, moreover, under the influence of factors, such as natural selection and the struggle for existence, which have come to be considered by thoughtful investigators as quite insufficient and even as nullities. Furthermore, the Theosophist can supply an absolutely definite and elevated purpose for the development of our solar system, whereas the solvers of the riddle of the universe, among whom was Nietzsche with his "endless return," maintain the purposeless repetition of the universal processes, or express themselves negatively. The immediate purpose of human evolution is the perfect

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production, in the distant future, of a new spiritual hierarchy, the most distinctive characteristic of which will be full moral freedom. If, on the other hand, we are told of primordial times quite unattainable for the natural scientist, there arises the legitimate question as to how those far-off times can be attainable for the clairvoyant vision. The answer given is that the history of the earth's development is, as it were, engraved in the spiritual world in a way that can be deciphered. It is certainly possible to put questions which even Theosophy is not able to answer satisfactorily. The fault however lies less in Theosophy than in the inadmissible way of formulating questions conditioned by our present stage of evolution.

The true germinal being of man, once slumbering in the bosom of the Deity, needed for its perfect development (possible only through earthly

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experiences) oft-repeated *incarnations* as a new personality. In noting the difference which Theosophy makes between individuality and personality one may say that individuality needs for its development change of personality, that is to say, individuality needs reincarnation just as that which constitutes the then earthly person requires metabolism. If we ask how it is that one cannot remember one's former earth-lives, then comes the answer that the remembrance will present itself at a sufficiently advanced development of the individuality — of the consciousness of the ego. In man as he is to-day the ego is still too little differentiated, because the consciousness of the group-soul is still too dominant. Individual exceptions there have been already, and are also at the present time. I name only Pythagoras, Goethe, and Novalis. Pythagoras is said to have recalled several of his earth-lives, Goethe said

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that he lived under the Emperor Adrian, and Novalis gives us clearly to understand that he remembered having been contemporary with Christ. The doctrine of reincarnation, solving as it does so many riddles, and of which the great skeptic Hume says that it is the only idea of immortality to which philosophy can listen, besides being met with in Theosophy is found not only in Buddhism but is hinted at in the Bible and, moreover, in the old Germanic religion, among the Kabalists, Neoplatonists, Gnostics, Manichæans, and Druids; and among the most varied thinkers—Plato, Seneca, Origen, Giordano Bruno, Voltaire, Lessing, Lichtenberg, Goethe, Schiller, Jean Paul, Rückert, Novalis, Zschokke, Schopenhauer, Richard Wagner, Hebbel, Max Müller, Hellenbach, Hübbe-Schleider, Mickiewicz, and Strindberg. Indeed, a few modern savants own to the doctrine of reincarnation; thus for example, the

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professors of philosophy, Jul. Baumann and H. Spitta, as well as the physicist Lodge.¹

Hand in hand with human development and the reincarnation necessary thereto goes the law of spiritual causality and of compensating justice, known under the name of *Karma*—the power which shapes our destiny, by virtue of which each one is his own evolutionary product. All blows of fate with which we meet—in so far as they are not quite experiences—we have ourselves caused in this or in an earlier life, and all our actions condition our future destiny, which is of course bound up with the Karma of the nation to which we belong, as also with the Karma of the whole human race. It is through Karma (which consequently is no "Fatum") and repeated incarnations that the

¹ Examples can be found in Deinhard's *Das Mysterium des Menschen*, Berlin, 1910, and in my brochure, *Die Kardinalfrage der Menschheit*, Leipzig, 1906.

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explanation can be given as to why the good man suffers while the bad man can be happy. The right insight into the Karmic law reconciles us so completely with fate that we can be thankful for misfortune in so far as we are, through affliction, definitely freed from the guilt incurred. We must, moreover, keep especially in sight the other side of Karma, the possibility of assuring to ourselves, through the right directing of this life, a profitable course for the one to come.¹

All sorts of objections, chiefly the result of shortsightedness, may be made against Karma and other Theosophical doctrines—all of which

¹ According to Guido v. List, the Sanscrit word Karma is derived from the old northern "Garman," or "Germen," which is employed in the same way. In the writings of this highly esteemed investigator of Aryanism, in *Die Religion der Ario-Germanen* (A. Burdeke, Leipzig), examples are also forthcoming for the fact that reincarnation, Garman, and other Theosophical basic doctrines belong to the most important dogmas of the old Germanic religion. Consequently, it is very probable that the Germans, because they felt themselves as "Powers of Destiny," have taken their name from "Germen."

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are, however, anticipated. I must limit myself to dealing with that objection which is connected with one of the most important of philosophical problems. It is said that Karma is not reconcilable with freedom of action. The true insight into this connection will be gained only when one is quite clear on the question of free will. That appears by no means an easy matter, for the greatest thinkers contradict themselves on that point. It seems to me that Steiner has in his *Philosophie der Freiheit*¹ met this difficult problem with a satisfactory solution. One cannot ask whether man is free or not. Much rather, he is on the road to freedom, and is at present partly free, partly bound; he is free in proportion as he has won for himself knowledge of the laws of his actions. Now in what concerns Karma and freedom it is not fate that acts, but

¹ *Philosophy of Freedom.*

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rather that man—in so far as he is free—sets in motion the necessary laws of fate. That reincarnation and Karma are in themselves necessary conceptions even from the standpoint of Natural Science, Steiner has shown in his brochure, *Reincarnation and Karma*.

Mention must be made of that particular basic principle which relates to *the component parts of the human being*. The four parts, interwoven with one another, of which it treats, first of all are the physical body (the only one known to the natural scientist), then the ether or life-body, the astral body, and the ego. The ether-body has nothing to do with the hypothetical ether of physics, but is rather a force-conformation almost congruent with the physical body, which latter it has built up and permeated, and which it holds together. That something as life-force must exist has of

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late been conceded by many scientists. One can, by simple reflection, convince oneself of the existence of the ether-body. The physical body consists merely of materials which exist also in the mineral kingdom. Yet these materials cannot display their indwelling powers as in the lowest kingdom of Nature; that is first possible to them in a dead body. Consequently, there must be something in a living person which works against these powers and prevents the decay of the physical body. Now this "something" is the so-called ether-body, which can, however, be observed also by the occultist. The case is quite similar with the astral body and the ego; they too can be mentally comprehended and clairvoyantly seen. The astral, or sentient, body has an oval form extending beyond the other two bodies and is the bearer of pleasure and pain, desires and passions.¹

¹ As to its essential being, it consists of moving color-pictures.

(What in other quarters has been referred to as the astral body, by Du Prel and his school, is in most cases the Theosophical ether-body.) Finally, the ego is the bearer of the self-consciousness of the higher powers of the soul.

This fourfold division now proves to be an extraordinarily fruitful principle. It leads us first of all to a determinate and striking differentiation of the four kingdoms of Nature. Granted that man consists of the above-named *four* parts, then the animal has *three* (physical, ether, and astral body), the plants *two* (physical and ether-body), and the minerals only a physical body. Thus we have something in common and something differentiative, which is incomparably more illuminating than when, in all four kingdoms, only a single principle (will or substance) is recognized. Further, the Theosophical comprehension of the human

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being leads to the solution of the problems of *sleep and death*, — problems quite unsolvable for the natural scientist. In deep, dreamless sleep the ego and the astral body have separated from the physical and ether-body, so that the person, until reawakening, leads what may be called a mere plant existence; but in death the ether and the astral body gradually dissolve, while the ego works out in the spiritual world the experiences gained in life, and by means of them prepares new conditions for the next earth-life. So death becomes a steppingstone to life. Again, dreams occur when, during sleep, the separation between the astral and ether bodies is not complete. Furthermore, the four *temperaments* can easily be explained by the fourfold division of man.

In the case of the melancholic person the physical body predominates; in the phlegmatic, the ether-body

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(in so far as it exerts a favorable influence over the physiological functions); in the sanguine person, it is the sentient body, and in the choleric person, the ego. Lastly, the analysis of the human being is of great service in the solution of the *question of heredity*. It is very evident that they are but half truths when a natural scientist (like the anatomist Rawitz) asserts that only physical qualities can be inherited, or when Schopenhauer maintains the transmission of all human qualities, or when Du Prel says that mental and moral similarities between children and those of their respective parents are to be traced solely to selective affinity. In contrast with this, Theosophy shows that the physical body, the ether-body, and the astral body constitute, in certain respects, one whole, and that consequently one part of the mental qualities is implanted by heredity, whereas the spirit (the

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ego) is quite independent of physical hereditary laws. Only thus the difference — frequently great — between brothers and sisters, and even twins, may be explained.

Three further members of the human entity will reach their development only in the course of ages, and this will take place through the work of the ego on the three lower members. From another point of view, Theosophy says also that man consists of three parts: body, soul, and spirit. This threefold division is conditioned through the existence of the three worlds to which man belongs equally: the physical world which is the only one accessible to the ordinary senses, then the mental and the spiritual, which are both of a supersensory nature. The transient body and the eternal spirit are temporarily, during the period of earthly existences, joined together by the soul — the seat of the human will.

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After this long but indispensable preface, with which, however, even the Theosophical A B C could not in any way be exhausted, I come to the connection between Occult Science and Christianity. Madame Blavatsky's sympathy for Buddhism is to be accounted for by the unfavorable impressions which she in her youth had received from Christianity, by her long sojourn in India, and for the most part by the unjust attitude of the Christian churches toward Indian wisdom. A more correct position toward Christianity, the real reason of which Madame Blavatsky could not, for special reasons, recognize, appears however in A. Besant's *Esoteric Christianity* and in G. R. S. Mead's *Fragments of a Forgotten Faith*, both of which have in view the Christ of the Gnostics. But, according to the occult science promulgated by Steiner, *the appearance of Christ is incomparably the most significant event of the*

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whole evolution of earth and of man. Concerning the great mystery here in question—to-day but partially disclosed and comprehensible—only general references can be made in public. It must be emphasized beforehand that the Theosophical perceptions in this case also are founded only on supersensory observations, on the reading in “spiritual records,” and therefore not on historical documents. The Biblical accounts are not taken as the starting point, but are certainly verified to the fullest extent. This fact is, in our time of destructive Biblical criticism, of most exceptional importance, even though the value of the Theosophical testimony, in spite of its indisputability, will at the present time be acknowledged by only a few.

To the question, “Who was Jesus of Nazareth?”—a question so often and so variously answered—the reply is given that He was a high Initiate

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who had to prepare Himself beforehand for an extraordinary mission, so to purify and to refine his physical frame that in the thirtieth year of His life He could receive, through the baptism of St. John, the Divine Being of Christ—a Being far exalted above a Buddha and other leaders of humanity. On this point the doctrine already put forward by the Gnostics is thus confirmed.

It is not the code of ethics already given elsewhere which is characterized as the essential part of Christianity, but rather the fact that Christ has lived in a human body and has poured out His Blood.¹ In order to understand the mighty impulse which was thereby given to human evolution we must direct our glance backward. The hierarchy already mentioned, to which mankind is to ripen, willing good of their own *full* free will, forms a collection of beings endowed with a

¹ Wagner's ideas about the Redeemer agree wonderfully well with this view of Christ and His mission.

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fully conscious ego who in a remote past were born out of the Godhead. For the development of complete independence these spiritual beings had to descend into matter, while on the other hand, for the gaining of freedom, *evil* (in the form of appetites and passions) has to be incorporated in human evolution. Without the choice between good and evil, moral freedom could not be conceivable. But the result of the descent into matter was that the connection with the spiritual world became more and more lost, and evil ever increasingly powerful, so that mankind would in due course have been suffocated in matter and egoism if the downward movement had not received again an upward direction through Christ. In a word, through Christ has been made possible *the future re-ascent into the spiritual world*, but a re-ascent associated with a complete consciousness of the ego! This is the

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most momentous though by no means the only consequence of the appearing of Christ upon earth. To him who is inclined to wonder that the effects of so great an event have not long ago been apparent, the thought must be offered that the evolution of man proceeds very slowly, and that, in spite of the gloomy appearance of our present stage of evolution, it is not possible to imagine where we should have been if Christ had not come.

It is to be further stated that Christ, from being a *cosmic* God, has become a *mystic* Divinity who can become *living* in every man when the latter has become ripe for it. Such a one can then *know* what, up to that time, he had to *believe*: the victory of the spiritual life over death. Let us not say that, consequently, a salvation has come to the people of to-day which was denied to the pre-Christian humanity, for

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post-Christian human beings are none other than those who were already then incarnated.

With the explanation of the Event of Palestine, the severity of the stern law of Karma — a law difficult to reconcile with the exoteric idea of mercy — is appreciably mitigated. As a person's fate may take a favorable turn if another is allowed to give him kindly help, so Christ helped the whole of humanity.

A word more on the subject of the Gospels. The Christian records must not be looked upon as ordinary documents, but as mystic writings obtained from the Traditions of the Mysteries. From this point of view all those defects disappear which we can rightly bring against the Gospels, if we take our position on the standpoint of materialistic historical investigation — that is to say, on what is based merely on the experiences of the senses; the faulty concordance,

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the incompleteness and imperfection of the accounts, as also the contested dates of their appearance, play no part at all. For the faulty concordance is quite simply explained by the fact that the authors have drawn the accounts from various mystery-traditions. The Evangelists did not wish to give any ordinary biography of Jesus of Nazareth, but a description of what, in the mystery-traditions of the time, had long been represented as a typical life of the Son of God. In this light, the St. John's Gospel which, to the rationalistic mind, appears the least intelligible, is seen to be the deepest and most important document of mankind. Further details can be found in R. Steiner's *Das Christentum als Mystische Tatsache*,¹ in which is shown the path to the *new way* along which "The Light of the World" must be proclaimed, if He is not to fade away

¹ *Christianity as a Mystical Fact*, M. Altmann, Leipzig.

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absolutely from humanity of to-day.

Theosophy also enlightens us concerning a fallacy lightly put forth by the superficial in the present-day controversy as to the existence of the historical Jesus Christ. Whereas the careers of a Gilgamesch (the Babylonian God-man¹), Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Paul, and others present certain resemblances, it is thought that they may be gathered from variations of sagas and that a former existence may be denied to all these personalities. On the other hand, according to Theosophy these similarities are conditioned by the fact that the lives of personalities who have to fulfill a high mission must run a certain course.

As will already have been seen, Theosophy implies no new religion; it desires rather to *explain* those of the present in reference to their origin, meaning, and differences. Whereas

¹ Superman.

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Science, in a thoroughly inadequate way, represents the points common to the various religions as a product of popular fancy stimulated by natural phenomena. Theosophy traces these common points back to a secret doctrine existent from earliest times, which the people were taught by the initiates and highly developed adepts, that is, by the founders of religions. Whereas leaders of mankind had to suit their teaching to the peculiarities and the various stages of development of the individual nations, on the other hand the considerable differences of religions become forthwith comprehensible. The whole of the new teaching is especially conciliatory, in that it shows how the spiritual currents introduced through the various religions have met together in Christianity, so that it alone is called to be the religion common to mankind. The powerful pictures which are unrolled over this Appearing

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—an Appearing grounded on a plan of evolution as deep as it is full of wisdom — provide us also with the answer to the difficult question *why Christ had to appear from among the Jews*. As to the reasons for this fact, only one can be expressed here, that the Jews kept most tenaciously to the love founded on blood relationship, and that consequently He, who not only inculcated (like Buddha) the spiritual, pure love of humanity, but had presented the *living embodiment* of it, could present among that people the sharpest contrast. The higher value of this new love was expressed in the apparently hard words, "Whoso leaveth not father and mother, brother and sister, wife and child, cannot be My disciple."

Theosophy supplies also the explanation with reference both to the system of philosophy and, in general, to all the phenomena of existence. Based upon an unrestricted

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tolerance, it is a central world-outlook given from a higher watch tower — primeval *wisdom* — through which one learns to grasp the whole of life with its contrasts, and which provides an answer to all the agitating questions of the day. It certainly shows most objective wisdom when it is proved that world-outlooks, which contradict each other, do not necessarily exclude one another, inasmuch as the contradictions are brought about by varying stages of knowledge.

For the deep knowledge which Theosophy offers demands of its followers, concurrent with a logical comprehension, *highly ethical* views. Just as it is possible that an insight into the law of Karma may spur a man on to the best guidance of his life, so should knowledge in general lead solely to the perfecting of man and to his higher evolution. It is very significant when it is said that a single act of true love for humanity

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is worth more than all the treasures of knowledge, if the latter are gained only through curiosity and remain unfruitful. Theosophy as a doctrine is merely a beginning; it must permeate the whole of life and enter into the most trivial matters. Consequently, one cannot speak of any such thing as hostility to life, of which it has been slanderously accused, and this latter much the less, owing to two special reasons which must not be left unmentioned: first, *the high estimation of art* (inasmuch as it, being a medium between the earthly and spiritual worlds, is exceedingly conducive to evolution), and second, the surmounting of pessimism as far as possible. If one sees an evil one's powers must be exerted to find the good to which the former often eventually leads. Briefly, one must work along the *positive* side, seek out and hold fast to the good as much as possible, for only thus can the world be

helped. Of course, if the Theosophist does not agree to all the proposals made by "practical" world-reformers, that is due to his more comprehensive points of view. Mrs. Besant stood for years in the social movement and gave a bright example of heroic self-sacrifice, but eventually she saw that all work is in vain unless the spiritual forces, to which Theosophy supplies the key, are set in motion.

And, by the way, one other fact. Many opposers of Theosophy (mostly non-informed) imagine they can decry it by mentioning it in the same breath with *spiritualism*. Certainly Theosophy does prove this, in common with theoretical spiritualism, that it holds the manifestations of the departed as possible, even as significant, *if they appear spontaneously*. On the other hand, it stands absolutely aloof from the practice of intercourse with spirits (which has been so much opposed, and to a certain extent

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rightly) because it has nothing whatsoever to do with bringing down the supersensory within easy reach of the external senses, but rather with developing in man those inner qualities, through which it is possible for him to raise himself into spiritual worlds. Moreover, it holds experimental spiritualism as harmful for those in the Beyond, as well as for the medium and the credulous people taking part in seances. Consequently, the bitterest opponents of Theosophy are to be found among the spiritualists.

When its true nature is once recognized, Theosophy will find its most fruitful field in Germany, because the national soul of the people directly yearns for it; the old Germanic religion even had the double doctrine of Reincarnation and Karma as an essential element. Also very many flowers of German mental culture, as expressed particularly by Goethe, Novalis, Schelling, and in no small

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degree by the works of Richard Wagner, have sprung from a thoroughly Theosophic mode of thought, even though our poets and thinkers were not always aware of the fact.¹

If Goethe is right in saying that "only the fruitful is true," then the crown belongs to Theosophy. No propaganda for Theosophy must be made through the foregoing, for it is by no means a matter of gaining as many adherents as possible, if they are not yet ripe for this outlook on the world. Rather, enlightenment and, on the other hand, directions, should be given to such as desire something deeper and more stable than what exoteric religions, philosophical systems, and the results of scientific investigation can supply.

¹ The connections between R. Wagner and Theosophy I have discussed in my book, *R. Wagner as Artist and Man, as Thinker and Epoch Maker*, Xenier-Verlag, Leipzig, soon to be issued in the English.

AFTERWORD

BY

RUDOLF STEINER

THE way in which the author of this treatise speaks in confirmation of my own attempts, both in the domain of the Theosophical philosophy of the universe and in my other scientific works, makes it difficult for me to clothe in suitable words my acquiescence with what he has said. And it is just because these declarations lay me under the obligation of saying something in conclusion that I find myself consequently in a rather difficult position. The assurance that I do not wish to regard opposite views with less understanding than those which, like Max Seiling's, concur in so high a degree with my own, will not be received

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without some objection. At the same time it is this which suggests to me to say something in an "Afterword." I should like to add something to the sentence on page 31 of this treatise, where it is said that objections against Theosophy, that are always made again and again, "are anticipated" by the latter itself. It is of course extremely simple and easy to "refute" Theosophy. Let us take the opinion about Reincarnation and Karma. Those who profess this opinion speak of an individual human essential-nucleus. This persists as supersensory essence when, with the advent of death, there falls away from it the physical body, which served it between birth and death as an instrument in the physical world. After an epoch of purely spiritual existence this nucleus rejoins itself to a physical organism in order to be born anew for a physical life. On the building up of this physical organization we must not

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now think that only those forces are engaged which call a human being into existence as one of his own kind, but, joined to these forces, are those which in a preceding life had become appropriated by the human essential-nucleus.

Now many a disciple of Theosophy, in order to strengthen the idea of reincarnation, will point out how the children of one and the same family are individually quite different from one another. He will say that these individual differences cannot be brought about merely through heredity, for the children all have the same ancestry. The individual must consequently arise from the entry of different individual essential-nuclei into similar hereditary conditions. However, the thought easily obtrudes itself which contradicts such an explanation of the given facts. The child carries within it peculiarities which, first of all, are inherited from

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father and mother. What is handed down from father and mother produces a result in the child. And in proportion as one or the other element predominates, in proportion as it works thus or thus on the other, so is it possible for the natural tendencies of each child of the same parents to be quite different individually. Again, one can add to this: the difference between human characters depends upon the connections in the chemical structure of the germ. And how should these not be different for different children born from the same parents in different periods of life? The difference itself in the case of twins proves nothing if we keep in mind that, in spite of their simultaneous development, the conditions of development prior to birth cannot possibly be exactly the same. Whoever sees in the psychic-spiritual peculiarities and in the character of a person the result of variously gradated hereditary

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conditions, and thinks thereby to stand on the firm ground of Natural Science, will consider the objections merely hinted at here—and which could be increased at will—as quite cogent.

A more weighty objection is apparently brought forward by those disciples of Theosophy who appeal to such facts of human life as, for instance, the feeling of individual responsibility and of conscience. They will say if man feels himself responsible he cannot attribute this feeling to a faculty which organizes him externally, but only to his individual essential-nucleus, which came into existence through birth. For how can a person hold himself responsible for something, the cause of which he has not in himself produced? Yet all that can be brought forward in this connection provides no basis at all for the idea of reincarnation.

There are many possible ways of

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explaining the feeling of responsibility and of conscience, even if we see no more in human beings than the result of natural tendencies inherited from the forefathers and that which has been appropriated in the course of physical development through the single individual, or through humanity as a whole. Among the many possible explanations, only one shall here be quoted. Let us suppose that the development of the human soul is simply at a more perfected stage than that of the animal; that his moral sense, for example, is only an enhancement of that which one finds as a moral impulse in the animal world. Then this higher stage can produce this effect, that human society shall demand from the single individual certain things. If he fail to fulfill these, then he puts himself in opposition to the external world. It must be demanded of him that he

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take as a starting point for his thoughts, feelings, and actions that which brings him into harmony with the life of his environment. Through the experiencing of such a demand the need must then develop of making himself only a starting point for actions of a certain nature. Out of such thoughts we have then the origin of the feeling of responsibility, of conscience, of the feeling for perfection. Indeed, very ingenious attempts have been made to explain by such methods the facts of the soul-life here quoted.¹

How convincing also must it appear when it is shown that with the deficiency of certain parts of the brain the corresponding manifestations of the soul are also absent. Indeed, in this connection the most varied refutations are brought forward by thinkers who do not acknowledge

¹ Among many, mention may be made of the interesting book of Paul Rée, *Die Entstehung des Gewissens* (*Origin of Conscience*).

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Theosophy. Still these do not seem by any means calculated to convince. We can see, for example, that when the strings of a piano are gradually cut through by a pianist, then he can bring out no more tones. But that does not mean to say that with the cessation of tone the pianist also vanishes. So also it is impossible for a human spiritual-psychic nucleus to manifest itself if the instruments—the portions of the brain—are destroyed. But the impossibility of self-revelation is no criterion that the spiritual-psychic nucleus has disappeared. Expressed thus, there is nothing convincing about this idea. For the pianist can still perceive how his instrument is spoiled; he is not demolished with it. It is just this last, however, which cannot be transferred to the psychic-spiritual nucleus. It seems quite impossible that any one who professes not to be able to grant it from his own stand-

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point should prove the independence of the spiritual-psychic nucleus of man through such comparisons as these. The idea just quoted, which has been brought forward numberless times, cannot convince any adversary of the independence of the human soul individuality. Such ideas will always have an explanatory value for those who acknowledge the supersensory from deeper reasons; they have no convincing value for those who do *not* acknowledge it. This holds good for all arguments already brought forward here for the supersensory in man. One can quote them in connection with the authoritative statements on behalf of the supersensory; but one will "prove" through them *nothing*.

The adversaries of Theosophy have a much easier task in reference to what is stated about the development of the higher faculties of perception for the supersensory. It seems as

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natural as possible to point out in this connection that he who has visions and hallucinations holds these as not less real than does the person who observes the facts of the supersensory world as real, on the ground of his so-called methodically trained perceptive powers.

It can also be asserted that even if one explains, on the ground of such powers, this or that statement in the region of fact, that does not prove anything at all, for such an explanation could also be an imaginary one. We have indeed examples of how much of what for a certain period of time could be explained only through supersensory powers found its explanation later through conditions observable by the senses. These are, to be sure, only suggestions, but it is easy to be seen how, through their adequate development on the very simplest lines, the assertions of the Theosophist can be gainsaid.

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It can be said that there is nothing in Theosophy in the basis of which one could not, in the way indicated, quite easily "pick holes" as being unproved statements, fancy, and so on. Consequently, with everything that is adduced through adherents of Theosophy there is not much to be done by the current methods of proof. It was, therefore, a right idea of Max Seiling to tune his statements to quite another key. One can understand what is meant only if one is willing to adopt this key. The author of this publication lets it everywhere be evident that it is not a question of a person's attitude toward this or that Theosophical statement, but of the apprehending of that basis of this philosophy of the universe which, in reference to its power of conviction points beyond the limits within which ordinary proof lies.

I have myself found it necessary to lay the foundation of this universal

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philosophy in a purely scientific manner, and then, through an adequate building up of Theosophy, to show the single truths, in so far as they result from the foregoing premises. So, for example, I cannot assume the fact, in regard to my brochure, *Reincarnation and Karma*, that any one else presenting what I have said in another connection will come to the same result as I. In that work I show how the present lines of thought in Natural Science must lead, in their logical sequence, to the idea of Reincarnation and Karma. Now as soon as one does not follow in this sequence, and does not see that the point lies in the entire "how" of the presentation, one misses the meaning of this small work. In the domain for the basis of the cognition-theory of the Theosophical philosophy of the universe Doctor Unger has worked still further; it can be seen through his statements

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also how fruitless must be every attempt that aims at putting forward a method of proof for Theosophy, or directing one against it, of which the adherent of Theosophy can for a single moment doubt that it will be as strong when used against him by way of refutation as for him when employed as proof. In the near future I shall give further expression to what has been here intimated; here I wished only to add a few words to the statements of Max Seiling, because the whole tone of his work seemed to me to lay the necessity upon me.¹

¹ No fact, for example, observed according to Natural Science, contradicts Theosophy. Yet one can employ countless things wherewith to "refute" Theosophy. The above cited will not appear, for the close observer, as contradicting the fact that the statements of Theosophy are in themselves *logically* capable of demonstration. Logical proofs are somewhat different, in the sense of the cognition-theory, from the "proof" here indicated.

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By

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